CARVINGSTONE AND INUIT CARVINGS: UNIQUE NORTHERN CANADIAN RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

The estimated annual retail value of Inuit "soapstone" stone carvings produced in the 1980s was about $20 million. The cash value of these carvings to the Inuit of the eastern Arctic was exceeded only by government wages and transfer payments. Carving is not a suitable alternative to steady wage employment, but is in many instances an alternate to unemployment and a source of instant cash.

The 1982 economic recession had a devastating effect on the sale and production of Inuit carvings and prints. Ongoing initiatives were required to cut costs, improve quality, reduce inventories, and promote and maintain an interest and appreciation of Inuit sculptures. One hopes that this valuable sector of the northern economy will continue to contribute to the national economy and culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to review some of the economic aspects of Inuit stone carvings or sculpture, an interesting and important component of the national and northern economies and culture. Carvers, dealers, accountants, art fanciers and critics, and government officials need to improve their perceptions of Inuit art and communicate with each other and the public, in order to define and find solutions to mutual problems.

Prehistoric Inuit Sculpture

Prehistoric Inuit sculptures of stone, ivory, bone and driftwood are known from the Arctic Small Tool (2500-800 BC), Dorset (800 BC-1350 AD) and Thule cultures (1000-1600 AD) (Martijn, 1964). These early pieces include: (I) small tools (pipes, knife handles, combs, etc.); (II) "magico-religious" objects to ward off illness, and miniature lamps, knives or harpoons deposited with the dead for use in the hereafter, and (III) toys and games.

About the 17th century, the Thule whale hunting communities of the Eastern Arctic proceeded to break up into nomadic bands that depended more and more on seal and caribou. During this transition stage, art forms declined in number, inspiration and quality (Martijn, 1964).

Historical Inuit sculpture

Throughout the entire 19th century, there was a limited, but fairly steady, demand for Inuit souvenir carvings (mainly ivory) as regular contacts were made with white explorers, whalers, traders and missionaries. This early "tourist trade" exerted considerable influence on the character of Inuit handicrafts.

Contemporary Canadian Inuit Sculpture

Contemporary Canadian Inuit sculpturing began in 1948 when James Houston, a painter, returned to Montreal from Hudson Bay with a few small soapstone carvings. He was commissioned by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild to make a test purchase of carvings, and when he returned the following year with a thousand pieces, they were exhibited and sold out in only three days. This overwhelming and spontaneous public acceptance of Inuit sculpture was completely unexpected. Other communities and organizations soon joined in the production and sale of sculpture. During the 1950s, the sudden growth of soapstone carving was the outstanding feature of economic activity in the eastern Canadian Arctic according to Graburn (1969, p. 157-158).

Contemporary Inuit sculpture differs from traditional sculpture in a number of ways, largely in response to the southern markets. Contemporary sculpture has increased in size to include pieces weighing more than 100 kg with dimensions as much as 1 m, whereas traditional sculpture was usually less than 10 cm and often less than 3 cm. Contemporary sculpture may be created from soapstone but is mainly created from other stone (argillite and serpentinite). Traditionally soapstone was used primarily for making crude lamps and pots for everyday use or trade, and sculpture was mainly ivory, bone or wood. The advantages of using stone include year-round availability and lack of size restrictions. More effective tools are available to the contemporary carver for working and obtaining stone. Traditionally, single, simple subjects were carved; however, contemporary work includes scenes with pieces interacting, for example, a hunter and a bear, a mother bear suckling cubs, or figures immobilized in a "moment in time." Other carvings depict a specific event, for example, pieces in the Justice J.H. Sissons' collection of memorable and precedent setting trials. Chess sets and ash trays are distinctive of contemporary sculpture.

The contemporary carver is likely to be primarily motivated by a cash reward and influenced by what he perceives will sell well. Many of the finer pieces of contemporary sculpture are properly described as "art," as contemporary artists add more detail, special effects and employ artistic license (for example, abstract carvings). Several carvers have developed notable styles, themes and reputations.

ECONOMICS OF INUIT CARVINGS

Introductory Economics

Carvingstone is one of three mineral commodities presently being produced in the Canadian Arctic. Its value is greatly enhanced during local secondary processing or carving. Typically, it is not included in mineral production statistics for Northern Canada. These statistics do not fairly represent the economic contribution of minerals to the North, because they report the value of metals contained in ores and are not discounted for profits, smelting, refining, transportation, interest and other charges that are earned by southern or foreign sources. Eskimo carvings are a multi-million-dollar sector of the national and northern economy, with estimated annual payments of $5 million to $10 million to as many as 2,000 Inuit carvers. Mark ups from transportation and other marketing costs, as well as retailers' profits, add an equal or greater amount to the final value.

The Inuit art sector, which also includes print making and appliques, exists because of demand in a very competitive marketplace. This marketplace shows typical business cycles: suffering serious down-turns in the early '50s when annual supply exceeded demand and in the early '80s as a result of an international recession. However, at other times remarkable market elasticity on the demand side has been able to absorb and sustain large increases in supply.

Several large business corporations have made substantial purchases of Inuit art for: decorating executive offices (Denison Mines Ltd.); as gifts (Dow Chemical Ltd.); as a patron of the arts (Toronto Dominion Bank Gallery of Inuit Art - originally started as a centennial project in 1967); and/or, to project a Canadian and/or northern corporate image (Hudson's Bay Co. - a major wholesaler/retailer of Inuit sculpture), (Schrager, 1986). Whatever the intrinsic value or reason for purchasing Inuit art, the tax department treats the pieces as a financial investment, subject to capital gains, depreciation, etc. (Arbuckle, 1987). Like other investments, it may appreciate or depreciate in value.

At least one investment club specializes in Inuit art and Inuit art tours have been made to the Arctic since the late '70s. Can Inuit art mutual funds, blind pools, etc., be far behind?

Importance to the National Economy

The main benefit to the national economy is through the employment of numerous citizens in northern and southern Canada. This is particularly true in the North where alternate employment is not as likely to be available. Secondary industries in the South include marketing and administrative centres, commercial, public and corporate art galleries, many individual advisors,

critics, art scholars, writers, photographers, etc., and last but least, several producers and distributors of mass-produced, cheap to expensive, plastic, plaster of Paris and crushed rock imitations of Eskimo sculpture.

Carvings also contribute to Canada's international balance of payments in as much as they are a distinctively Canadian product and roughly 20 per cent of all Inuit art is sold to foreign tourists and foreign art dealers.

The Canadian government has subsidized the collection and distribution of raw stone, various national and international art exhibitions, publications and advisers from time to time. However, these incentives are economically justified and must not be classed in the same sunk cost category as ongoing subsidies available to the parliamentary cafeteria, Dome Petroleum Ltd. and others. More importantly, Inuit art, like maple leaves, beavers and Mounties, is a Canadian identity symbol. As Nelson Graburn (1986) points out, Eskimo carving became desirable and economically viable during and because of a unique situation that existed after World War II. The Cold War was heating up, the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. were encroaching on the Arctic, and DEW Line stations were going up on Canadian soil. These events created a need to establish a Canadian identity both internationally and domestically. The Canadian government determined that "the promotion and visibility of this new and uniquely Canadian Inuit art would show the world that Canada was indeed a great Northern power." Interestingly, Canada's need to assert its Arctic sovereignty has reappeared in recent times. The fact that Eskimo sculpture did not/could not evolve or develop to the same degree in Alaska or Greenland can be explained by different political and economic conditions in these areas.

Importance to the Northern Economy

Contrary to a widely held belief, carving has been a far more important and reliable source of cash in the North than fur. This even applies to Pangnirtung, the most important fur - producing community in the eastern Arctic. An exception is the western Canadian Arctic where little carving is done, but income from petroleum exploration and fur, mainly Arctic fox, is very important and substantial, though erratic. Food obtained through hunting and fishing has a greater replacement value to most Inuit than carvings or fur, but food cannot be easily converted into cash needed for the purchase of manufactured goods.

Carving income earned by individuals and local co-ops in the eastern Arctic has an economic multiplier greater than unity. This may be reflected in the fact that many bank notes (dollar bills) get passed back and forth until they are ready to fall apart. However, with money spent in oil exploration in the western and high Arctic, the multiplier has been typically

considerably less than one due to the fact that most of what is spent is paid to southern suppliers and workers. The end of generous subsidies such as the Petroleum Incentives Program and lower energy prices has also meant the end of much of the oil exploration in the Arctic.

A great deal of ethnic cultural information is contained in Inuit stone carvings. This fact is recognized by the Inuit Cultural Institute (ICI) as well as by many collectors. Information may be personal as demonstrated by Joe Talirunili's carvings of epic migration trips in large seal skin boats between islands in Hudson Bay and the mainland. Inuit beliefs and legends such as mermaid-like sednas or devil-like shamans are a recurring theme. The traditional Eskimo lifestyle is often portrayed in hunting scenes, pull apart igloos and kayaks. Recent changes such as the use of snowmobiles have shown up in some carvings. Carvings of Arctic wildlife, including seals, whales, narwhals, walrus, polar bears, musk oxen, fish and a great variety of birds are plentiful.

Importance to Northern Communities

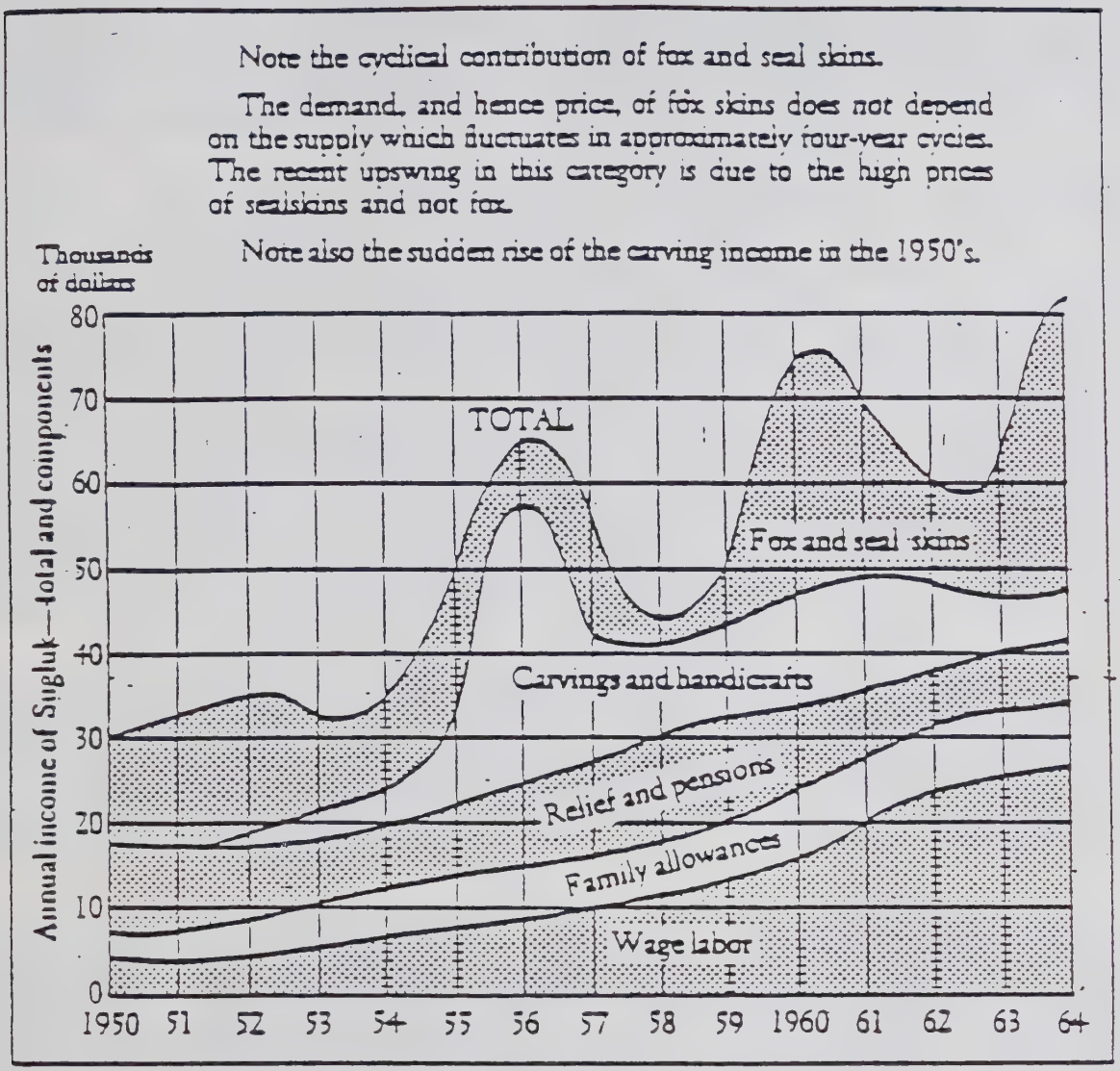
Cape Dorset, Sanikiluaq, Inukjuak and Povungnituk are examples of communities that have become relatively prosperous and famous due to their carvers. However, the economic importance is greatest in Lake Harbour, a small community on southwestern Baffin Island, where annual carving income per family exceeds $10,000 (May, Pearson and Associates Ltd., 1983). About 50 communities in the eastern Canadian Arctic and several in the west are involved in carving activities.

In many Arctic communities, Eskimo co-operatives and even some Hudson's Bay stores are largely supported by sales and purchases of Inuit art and crafts. Many co-ops also provide goods (groceries, fuel, hunting supplies, carvingstone) and services (hotels, fishing camps, banking services, even cable television) at competitive or lower prices than would otherwise be available, if available at all. When a co-op goes bankrupt or is forced to suspend purchases of carvings, the community experiences increased unemployment and economic hardship.

Data from Sugluk for the 1950s (Figure 1, from Graburn, 1969) illustrate the economic importance of carving at the community level. By 1956, carving was responsible for more than half of the community's income; however, when the main purchaser of carvings, the local Hudson's Bay Company store, suddenly stopped buying in 1957 great hardship was experienced until the government administrator and eventually the Hudson's Bay began to buy carvings again.

In some cases, there is a strong correlation between the decrease in carving payments and increase in welfare payments.

Figure 1 Total Income and Component Parts; Sugluk 1950–1964



Unfortunately, relatively high carving income does not mean a community is more prosperous than others. The highest per capita income is normally found in regional government centres (eg. Kuujjuaq - formerly Fort Chimo), where it may be assumed that there is the lowest amount of productive activity. Generous welfare payments (in some cases, more than non welfare carvers can earn), welfare reductions equal to carving income and government wage employment are all inducements to abandon productive carving activities.

Importance to Individuals

Like other workers, Inuit carvers are primarily motivated by cash reward. Most greatly prefer hunting, and many combine the two occupations. More than 2,000 Inuit carve at least part-time. 200 of these could be considered major producers, with income greater than $5,000 per annum; 10 to 20 of the more talented and productive carvers are capable of earning $30,000 or more per year. These more talented individuals earn their livelihood and support their families through carving and deserve to be known as artists. They tend to produce fewer, but larger, higher priced carvings, often on commission. Most of the part-time carvers are best described as craftsmen. They carve for pocket money and major purchases of snowmobiles, rifles, TVs and VCRs.

Some Inuit artists can and do become emotionally involved while carving, this often leads to considerable personal satisfaction with the final outcome. Other non-material benefits include self-esteem and peer appreciation and respect. Interestingly, the ability to sell at high prices is admired as much as the ability to do first-class carving.

The flexible nature of carving in terms of time, place and equipment requirements is far more suitable to the needs and work ethics of most Inuit than highly structured wage employment. The elderly and handicapped can and do take part and there is no age or sexual discrimination. The initial investment for tools and stone is negligible, but some people must spend considerable time and effort to bring their skill up to standards that make their efforts worthwhile.

There are talented Dene and Metis sculptors in the Mackenzie region and other parts of Canada. However, the impact of their work is more limited. Some Indian people also carve wood, a commodity not as commonly available to Inuit.

CARVINGSTONE RESOURCES

Economic Geology of Carvingstone

Carvingstone can be defined as any rock type or stone that can be carved. However, because stone preferred by one carver may

be rejected by another, it is not always easy to determine what is carvingstone and what is not. For example, "soapstone" is a rock type composed mainly of a very soft mineral named talc. In the past it was widely used to make seal-oil lamps (kudliks) and pots. It is almost impossible to handle without scratching, because it is so soft, and often contains minerals of differendt hardness. It is rarely used for carving sculpture and only as a last resort.

Most Inuit carvings are made from light- to dark-green to black serpentine-rich rocks that are correctly named serpentinite. The purest and best material has a distinctive yellowish-green colour, a greasy feel, a waxy lustre, a hardness ranging from 2.5 to 5 and takes a good to excellent polish. Some pieces may contain veinlets of white serpentine asbestos and others tiny black magnetite crystals. The rock is composed mainly of hydrous (wet) magnesium silicate minerals including serpentine, talc and chlorite, often with relics of harder anhydrous (dry) magnesium silicates such as olivine and pyroxene. Serpentinites are formed by the alteration of ultramafic (magnesium-rich) igneous rocks (Mary River and Markham Bay) or the metamorphism of impure dolomite (magnesium carbonate) sedimentary rocks (Aberdeen Bay).

The second most common carvingstone is a metamorphosed, laminated sedimentary rock called argillite. The excellent and distinctive carvings from Arctic Bay and Sanikiluaq in the Belcher Islands are made from argillite. This rock is formed when clay-rich sediment or mudstone is heated or "cooked" by a hot igneous rock called diabase that commonly fills large cracks or fractures in the earth.

Two other rock types that are potential sources, but are rarely used, are marble and rocks that have undergone magnesium metasomatism. Several marble belts are known on southern Baffin Island, but the marble tends to break easily and frequently contains impurities of harder minerals. Magnesium metasomatism refers to rocks soaked with magnesium-rich solutions (eg., sea water), a process that often forms metallic mineral deposits, for example at Baton Lake, some 200 km north of Yellowknife.

Variations in carvingstone, such as layering or alteration zones, can in the hands of talented and imaginative carvers, be used to enhance the beauty and uniqueness of a carving (see Photos 1-3), and ultimately its artistic and economic value. Extremely large pieces may be referred to as "hernia stones" or "bankers' stones" with reference to those who must lift them or can afford to purchase them.

Exploration for Carvingstone

Adequate supplies of accessible, good-quality stone form the starting point for carvings and are just as important as markets

PHOTO 1

Bird by Annie Arraqutainaq, Belcher Islands - argillite. The bird has been carved so that the dark sedimentary layer highlights the bird's wing.

PHOTO 2

Inuit mother and child by Moses Koonark, Pond Inlet - altered peridotite from Mary River. The dark bands have been skillfully used to decorate the woman's parka (amouti) and seal skin boots (kamiks).

PHOTO 3

Drummer by Morris Tungilik, Gjoa Haven - black serpentinite. A patch of white alteration in the rock, appropriately outlines a badly frost bitten nose.

are at the other end. For example, a deposit of excellent carvingstone found at Aberdeen Bay in 1954 has been the source of stone for millions of dollars worth of Lake Harbour and Cape Dorset carvings (Bruemmer, 1980). On the other hand, communities with limited access to carvingstone quite often lose their best carvers and income earners to communities with good supplies.

Carvingstone is not obtained from a specific quarry in some areas, but is selected from boulder fields, eskers, or talus slopes at the base of cliffs. Certain cliffs in the Coronation Gulf - Bathurst Inlet area are the source of some carvingstone. Selecting and obtaining carvingstone from the land is an intergal part of carving for some carvers.

The Geology Division of INAC has been involved with exploration, examination and inventory of carvingstone for a number of years (Murphy, 1973 and Hogarth, 1975). As with other mineral resources, nature has distributed carvingstone unevenly. Therefore, knowing what communities need stone, what geological environments are favorable and where these exist are very important in the assigning of priorities and narrowing down areas to take maximum advantage of limited resources. A typical prospecting team consists of a geologist and one or more Inuit carvers. The carver adds a keen pair of eyes, invaluable experience and a knowledgeable opinion to the team. Finally, a small collection of files and sandpaper is used to test the suitability of rock for carving and polishing.

The most successful of several projects resulted in the discovery of a new locality of excellent quality stone in the Mary River-Nuluujaak Mountain area of northern Baffin. This distinctive light-green stone was discovered by Phillip Pitseolak of Pond Inlet in July, 1981. Within a year, the value of carvings purchased by the Pond Inlet co-op increased eight-and-a-half times to $85,000 (Table 1). Currently, the site is the source of almost all carvings produced in Pond Inlet and Clyde River, and most of those produced in Igloolik and Hall Beach.

Geological Survey of Canada maps by Jackson (1979) showed that the area contained large areas of favourable ultramafic rocks. Indeed, Phillip and his brother Simionie had been collecting stone at another poorly exposed site in the area (Photo 4), but the new site had the advantage of easy mining (a crowbar is all that is needed - Photo 5), and excellent accessibility and transportation (blocks can be slid down a perennial snowbank and picked up at the bottom by snowmobile or all-terrain tricycles). An abandoned but usable airstrip is located a few kilometres away and an abandoned road leads to Milne Inlet.

Also in 1981, Dr. William Padgham of the Geology Division and Dr. Rollie Ridler, then with Newmont Mining Ltd., identified

TABLE 1 COMMUNITY CARVING INCOME DISTRIBUTION (VALUE TO CARVERS) - BY SOURCE

NATIVE POP. JUN-JUL 81		VILLAGE	1980-81 CO-OP	1980-81 OTHER	1980-81 TOT	1980-81 *B PER FAMILY	1981-82 CO-OP	1981-82 OTHER	1981-82 TOT	1981-82 *B PER FAMILY
242	NWT	LAKE HARBOUR	181	400E	581	12,004	161	350E	511	10,556
672	NQ	INUKJUAK	653	225E	878	6,533	876	200E	1,076	8,006
722	NWT	CAPE DORSET	668	350E	1,018	7,050	561	300E	861	5,963
275	NQ	AKULIVIK	137	NIL	137	2,491	289	NIL	289	5,255
750	NQ	POVUNGNITUK	540	200E	740	4,935	611	175E	786	5,240
371	NWT	SANIKILUAQ	267	125E	392	5,283	216	100E	316	4,259
328	NWT	REPULSE BAY	250E	50E	300	4,573	165	50E	215	3,277
195	NQ	IVUYIVIK	61	NIL	61	1,564	90	NIL	90	2,308
1,562	NWT	FROBISHER BAY	61	550E	611	1,956	99	500E	599	1,917
583 *C	NQ	GREAT WHALE R.	92	50E	142	1,218	167	50E	217	1,861
366	NWT	ARCTIC BAY	NIL	150E	150	2,049	NIL	120E	120	1,639
767	NWT	PANGNIRTUNG	200	150E	350	2,282	122	125E	247	1,610
499	NQ	SUGLUK (SALLUIT)	93	10E	103	1,032	140	15E	155	1,553
722	NWT	IGLOOLIK	96	4E	100	693	125	5E	130	900
662	NWT	POND INLET	10E	5E	15	113	85	5E	90	680
831	NWT	BAKER LAKE	85E	50E	135	812	50E	50E	100	602
9,547			3,394	2,319	5,713	2,992	3,757	2,045	5,802	3,039
			59%	41%	100%		65%	35%	100%	

*A From May, Pearson Ltd., 1983.
*B Assumes 5 Inuit per family (Beaulieu, 1983), and uses the June-July, 1981 population figures through
*C Does not include the 425 Cree in the community.
*E = Estimated.

PHOTO 4

Phillip and Simionie Pitseolak quarrying carvingstone at Mary River. Considerable digging and hammering are required at this site. Other problems include: harder rock at depth; and, waste rock and overburden covering usable stone.

PHOTO 5

Phillip Pitseolak at his discovery on Nuluujaak Mountain, northern Baffin Island.

and reported for the first time a soapstone locality at Baton Lake (200 km north of Yellowknife), while on a visit to an adjacent gold prospect. Samples proved to be good to excellent quality carvingstone. This site is not being used because it is in an isolated and uninhabited area. However, there is a possibility that this deposit could be used to supply carvers in the Yellowknife area, in conjunction with current mining development by Neptune Resources Ltd. at Baton Lake.

In 1985 and 1986, I sampled peridotite bodies in the Hope Bay area, midway between Bathurst Inlet and Cambridge Bay, in conjunction with geological mapping of the Hope Bay Volcanic Belt. These rocks were described in the mineral exploration reports from the 1960s as, "peridotite which is locally used by Eskimos as carving stone." These days, there are no known inhabitants or active camps in the area, so it is difficult to confirm the deposits former use or importance. This rock is harder than most, but not all, carvingstone. It should be considered as a large, low-grade resource, with potential for use sometime in the future.

Mineral Economics and Mining

There are a number of common or similar economic factors involved in carvingstone supply and traditional mining operations and mineral resources. Accessibility and the availability of good cost-effective transportation are critical to the development and use of any mineral deposit. Travel to the deposit may be by snowmobiles, boats, aircraft and even backpacking.

Stone is normally obtained by means of very primitive mining and transportation methods. Mining equipment is often no more than hammers, chisels, and crow bars, but sometimes gasoline-powered drills and non-explosive demolition agents (S-mite) are available.

As with so many aspects of Inuit society, it is difficult for preconditioned southerners to comprehend how a system so different from their own can operate. Yet the mining or quarrying of carvingstone works and works well without the mineral economists, mining inspectors, trade unions, exploration departments, government regulations, lawyers, stock certificates and so on that seem to be so essential in the southern mining world.

Inuit believe that nobody owns the land, sky or sea; thus, they have felt no need for legislation to deal with carvingstone rights. Typically, local Inuit share carvingstone without question, but become upset when others, particularly non- locals, attempt to commercialize quarrying and profit from selling "their stone" back to them or exporting it to others. Several years ago, an attempt to deal commercially in carvingstone at Baker Lake was

abandoned, when local people impressed upon the individual involved, that this simply wasn't done and was unacceptable to them. More recently, a commercial enterprise, based in Iqaluit (formerly Frobisher Bay), has contracted for relatively large shipments of carvingstone from the Aberdeen Bay site, the source of an exceptionally fine carvingstone that is characteristic of the Cape Dorset and Lake Harbour sculpture. This issue has been raised in the GNWT legislative assembly by Baffin South MLA Joe Arlooktoo, himself a Lake Harbour carver. The issue has not been resolved, apparently because the GNWT lacks the political will to find and impose a solution.

It is difficult and pointless to attempt to calculate the volume or value of ore reserves because carvingstone is often variable in quality and distribution and because it is normally sold for transportation costs or given away. Erratic rates of consumption and lack of records make it impossible to determine rates of past production, much less make valid projections of future use.

We can say that carvingstone resources vary from more than adequate in communities such as Arctic Bay to less than adequate or non-existent. In the latter case, carvingstone may be imported from other communities or southern Canada at considerable expense.

Unfortunately, most managers concerned with the carving business are like their cousins in the mining industry. They are more concerned with quarrying, transporting and selling carvingstone than with replacing it or finding new deposits. Consequently, with no rewards or incentive for Inuit to explore for carvingstone, there is almost no exploration or prospecting and new sources are not being found or developed.

ONGOING PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic Recession

The 1982 business recession had as great an effect on Inuit carving as on most other sectors of the economy. As carving is a factor of the national and particularly the northern economy, a drop in carving sales was to be expected, but the relative magnitude of the drop (Table 1) and the seriousness of its consequences are due to a number of reasons. Some of these were related to the structure of the Inuit carving market (see Appendix 1) and others to the shortage of capital and greatly reduced expectations for investment appreciation common to all collectibles in a recessionary business cycle.

The Inuit Carving Market

In the period prior to the recession, production in terms of number of carvers, pieces, prices, sales and profits was at an

unprecedented level. Demand more than matched supply and the value of carvings was appreciating rapidly. Unfortunately, the buoyant market led to record inefficiencies in the system, which become major, even critical, problems once the effects of the recession took root. Clearly, the biggest problem was the rapid accumulation by wholesales of large inventories of what were soon realized to be over-priced, unsaleable carvings.

Soon the cost of maintaining these inventories during a period of record high interest rates became unbearable. Needless to say, profits and dividends to member co-ops vanished at the same time. The seriousness of the situation was compounded by the fact that the wholesalers' agents, the local co-ops and HBC stores, had continued to purchase large quantities of carvings. Like inflation before it, recession arrived an average of six months later in the North.

The solutions for the wholesalers were difficult but necessary. They stopped accepting or purchasing shipments from local co-ops, who in turn developed inventory problems and were forced to stop buying any carvings (over-priced or not) from their carver members. Carvers, suddenly faced with lower than expected returns, stopped or greatly reduced their carving activities. In the case of those producing poor carvings the recession may have been a good thing; unfortunately, some of the better carvers may have given up carving temporarily or completely, and their lost production might not be replaced. For many, there is no other option and data collected by May, Pearson and Associates Ltd. (1983) indicate that lost income has been replaced with welfare.

Fortunately, the worst of the 1982 recession is in the past, and the Inuit carving market has survived as a healthy, albeit smaller, business. Sales in 1986 were almost at 1981 levels. Nevertheless, a number of problems and potential problems - including the probability of future recessions - remain. May, Pearson and Associates Ltd. (1983) made several fairly obvious and useful recommendations, including:

- Wholesalers should write off existing inventories and store them indefinitely. There should be no attempt to destroy them, (unlike the practice of the Egg Marketing Board with its own commodity).

- There should be a more efficient, less expensive carver to retailer system. A lot of repricing and repackaging could be eliminated by having the wholesalers' representative visit communities to buy and appraise carvings for direct shipment to retailers. This would ameliorate the problem of well intentioned but transient and inexperienced white buyers or local native buyers who may be biased by personal relationships with carvers.

- There is a need for more communications. Carvers could benefit from workshops, newsletters and film strips that explain pricing and marketing or allow for the interchange of skills and ideas. One suggestion is the provision of Carving Heritage Grants to assist in the preservation and collection of the Inuit cultural record through carvings.

- There should be attempts to improve marketing. Past experience shows that this is easier said than done, but more well-prepared, bibliographic material and background literature and new retail outlets are needed.

Imitation Inuit Sculptures

It is not uncommon to see plastic, copper, wax, coal, plaster of Paris, cement and other materials molded into seals, musk oxen, kayaks and other traditional Inuit themes. Found in various gift shops, drug stores, newsstands, and even HBC stores these "carvings" are obviously mass produced and come with high profit margins to distributors and retailers. Most sell for less than $10 or $20, but some range up to $100 plus, higher than many small Inuit sculptures. They appear to sell well, and I would assume their annual retail value to be several hundred thousand dollars. It would be difficult to say how much this unwanted secondary industry affects sales of Inuit carvings. Unfortunately, the good taste of the consumer is the best answer to this problem.

Status of Carvingstone Supplies

Most communities where carving is an important economic activity have access to good, relatively low-cost carvingstone. The answer to local shortage has been regional or southern imports. Geologists and others working in the eastern Canadian Arctic should be aware of the importance of carvingstone and note all potential sources they may come across. Incentives, either rewards or grubstakes or both, should be provided to Inuit hunter/carvers. The Northwest Territories government has and should continue to sponsor research into techniques and equipment that would permit more efficient mining and transportation of carvingstone. The GNWT must also show the political means to protect local sources of stone from commercialization and non-local people.

Health Hazards

There appears to be a very serious health hazard connected with the dust produced in the carving process. Soapstone commonly contains a variety of asbestiform minerals known to be carcinogenic. The dangers are greatly increased for carvers who: work in small, poorly ventilated areas; are heavy smokers; or, have respiratory problems.

The Department of Health and Welfare and the Occupational Safety Division of Labour Canada should make a thorough investigation of all aspects of this problem and publicize these dangers. Unfortunately, this problem has not been adequately addressed in Northern Canada.

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APPENDIX I

The Structure of the Inuit Carving Market

Most carvings are sold for cash to local stores that act as agents for major wholesalers. These wholesalers are the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the two Inuit-owned co-ops: Arctic Co-operatives Ltd. (ACL) and its subsidiary Canadian Arctic Producers (CAP) (Knowles, 1982), and La Federation des Cooperatives du Nouveau-Quebec (FCNQ) (Myers, 1979).

Some purchases are made by smaller independent gallery owners or individual collectors, who make annual or semi-annual buying trips to certain communities. Still other sales are made to local white residents, visitors and tourists. The wholesalers then reprice and repack carvings for consignment to commercial galleries, craft, gift, souvenir and department stores and other retailers, including the wholesalers' own retail outlets. Final purchasers can be classed as souvenir or gift buyers, art collectors and investors, museums, well-to-do individuals, and decoration buyers usually being large corporations.

The May, Pearson and Associates Ltd. (1983) reports are recommended for more details.